

The
Story of Deerfield

1630-1930

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Photo by Frances and Mary Allen

DEERFIELD

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

By
MARY WILLIAMS FULLER

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THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

1630-1930

THREE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, the waters gathering at the foot of the Green Mountains in southern Vermont had merged themselves into a turbulent, rushing river which came hurrying through the deep gorges and wild ravines of the western hills to spread themselves leisurely out in brown ripples and placid still places along the meadows of the wide and lovely valley we know as Deerfield. The Indians called the river and the stately hill that stands solemn guard to the east, Pocumtuck, the name of their tribe.

This was to them a favorite spot. How long they had dwelt here, there is no telling. Wherever the land rises above high-water-mark of the ever recurring spring floods of the river, traces of their habitation can be

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

found. Arrowheads, stone implements, and bits of pottery are even to this day turned up by the plow or discovered by the process of digging. Graves of many an Indian warrior have been unearthed with accompanying stone weapons or other symbolic emblems.

Tradition tells us that at the time of the coming of the white man to the shores of Massachusetts the Indians were dwelling here in well-established security. The Pocumtucks seem to have been a powerful tribe not lacking in dignity and pride. They were an agricultural people. Corn grew in the fertile meadows; game abounded on the wooded hillsides; salmon and shad as well as smaller fish swam in the streams. The Indians used the poorer sorts of fish to fertilize their corn; and so abundant was it that in 1638 John Pynchon, who had helped to settle Springfield in 1635, made his way up the Connecticut River to Pocumtuck to purchase corn to save the settlements farther down the river from starvation. Loaded in canoes, it was easily

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

floated down the river. For many years, friendly relations existed between the Indians of this region and the early settlers of Wethersfield, Windsor, Springfield, Hadley and Hatfield.

The Pocumtucks were at times at war with other tribes, but they seem to have maintained their supremacy till about 1660. Tales of a thousand warriors gathering here have come down to us. Perhaps they assembled here because of the wide area that could be watched over and guarded from the lofty summit of Pocumtuck Mountain, or from the abrupt and steep heights of Wequamps (Sugar Loaf).

Soon after 1660, a fierce war broke out between the Pocumtucks and the Mohawks from the Hudson River valley in which the Mohawks proved victorious. The Pocumtucks were almost exterminated, and this, perhaps, accounts for the ease with which men sent here from Dedham in 1665 were able to purchase 8000 acres of land with which Dedham

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

was to reimburse her people whose land there had been taken for John Eliot's missionary Indians. Quaint deeds of this transaction are to be seen in our Memorial Hall signed by the mark "X" after their strange names; some of them being the names of squaws, showing that they held land and could deed it away.

By 1669 Samuel Hinsdale, a son of one of the Dedham owners, had come here to settle, and his son Mehuman, born in 1673, was the first white child born here. About twenty families came here to settle between 1671 and 1673. The village street was planned; house lots apportioned; boundaries established, some of which exist to this day. The site for a church was chosen, and a minister bespoken although not settled at this time. Until 1675 peace prevailed. No fear of disturbance or danger perturbed these busy people as they cultivated the fields and built their houses. The Indians went and came unmolested and unmolesting.

Meanwhile, in the eastern part of Massa-

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

chusetts a different state of things began. Discontent, probably not without cause, grew among the Indians of that region and spread its contagion rapidly and with ever increasing ferocity. A general uprising, known as King Philip's War, broke out in the spring of 1675. Death and destruction fell upon all outlying towns. Soldiers were hurried to their help; stockades were built, and close guard maintained.

Brookfield was burned August 2. Soldiers were attacked at the foot of Wequamps on August 24, this being the first fight with the Indians in the Connecticut valley. Deerfield was assailed September 1. No lives were lost, but a few buildings outside the stockade were burned. September 2, Northfield was set upon and several people were killed. Two days later, a troop of soldiers sent to their relief was ambushed near the town and largely destroyed. Northfield had then to be abandoned.

On Sunday, September 12, while the

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

settlers were collected in the palisades or fort for worship, Deerfield was again attacked. Horses and cattle were driven off or killed; grain and other spoils carried off. Consternation prevailed. Troops were hurried to the Connecticut valley from the more thickly populated eastern part of the state. On September 17, a troop of soldiers under Captain Lothrop of Beverly, called "The Flower of Essex County," was sent to Deerfield for corn and wheat for some of the over-crowded garrisons in the towns below.

The next morning, a lovely, warm September morning, a long train of heavily loaded carts driven by seventeen men of Deerfield, escorted by Lothrop and his soldiers, set forth from the southern gate of the fort fearless of the frightful danger of these infuriated savages. Five miles south of here at the crossing of a small brook, they were set upon suddenly by six or seven hundred Indians. Only two or three of all that company escaped unhurt. Lothrop and his men were slain. The brook

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

has ever since been called Bloody Brook. Near it is the grave of sixty-four New England men.

Deerfield could no longer be maintained. Its people were speedily escorted to safety; and once more the Indians occupied their old haunts.

Innumerable attacks occurred all up and down the valley. Springfield, Hatfield, Hadley, Northampton, and Longmeadow all suffered. The Indians gathered in large numbers and grew careless and contemptuous of the English. At length, it was decided that some strong measure of retaliation must be taken. It was resolved to send a large body of men to surprise the Indians in their camp at Peskeompskut, the great falls of the Connecticut north of Pocumtuck.

On May 19, 1676, about one hundred and forty men led by Captain William Turner marched by night from Hadley through the long aisles of wooded roadway over swamps and across rivers twenty miles and more to their destination at the falls. The sleeping

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

enemy was surprised. A fierce fight followed. Many Indians were killed; many wigwams destroyed, squaws and children slain; but also many of the English perished including the brave leader. Peskeompskut was henceforth to be known as **Turner's Falls**.

But little was gained. France and England became more deeply involved in war. Gradually, the French in Canada acquired the allegiance of many Indian tribes again instigating them to onslaughts upon the outlying settlements of the English.

For fifty years, off and on, this sort of induced hostility prevailed from Maine to Virginia; and this, added to wars between the various tribes which now sought help from the French and again from the English, made frontier life most hazardous.

Seldom did our English forefathers avail themselves of the savages as allies; but now and then a tribe adhered in its allegiance to the English, and from them scouts were obtained.



Photo by Frances and Mary Allen

OLD HOUSES, DEERFIELD STREET

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

After the disasters of 1675, no immediate attempt was made to resettle Deerfield; but in 1677 three or four venturesome men, believing the Indians to be gone, and relying too much on the effect of King Philip's death (his influence seems always to have been over-rated), came back to Deerfield and once more started to build. On September 19, before their houses were habitable or their families here, they were attacked, captured and carried to Canada with a number of men and women and children from Hatfield; the first of the many captives to follow that long, hard trail.

Undeterred by all this suffering and loss, a large number of families, some of them those who had been forced to leave after the Bloody Brook disaster, came back in 1682; built more substantial houses and established a village here, following the original plan of "an artiste employed to lay out the street" by the Dedham owners.

They chose the mile-long plateau that rises from the meadows at the south by a steep

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

bank, and ends similarly at the north, securing the dwellings from the spring floods of the capricious Deerfield river. A site for a church and the principal houses was selected on a still higher piece of ground in the center. A stockade was built surrounding this part of the village, and soldiers were quartered here. Great caution was necessary. Raids were not infrequent. Men carried their guns everywhere; even in church they were not left behind. Men were attacked in the fields or mending fences or going to the mill two miles away.

It is scarcely possible for us to conceive of the courage and indomitable pertinacity of these isolated people, cut off absolutely from all help, save as some intrepid horseman, if fortunate enough to escape, bore the news of alarm through many miles of forest and bog. For nearly a quarter of a century after this last and permanent settlement, the Deerfield people lived in perpetual dread of the savages that might be lurking in any wooded space or watching the village from the hill above.

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

To add to their discomfort, in the autumn of 1691, a party of fifty warriors and about a hundred squaws and children came to camp on the hillside of the town above a little settlement called Wapping to use the right which had been reserved to them in their deeds of land to hunt and fish. These Indians, purporting to be friendly, had to be received as such; although grave doubts as to their conduct, in case hostile Indians arrived, disturbed the settlers. Guards and scouts were reinforced; palisades were strengthened. An anxious winter ensued, and great were the rejoicings when, in May, they finally departed. Many alarms and rumors of intended invasions reached the town, and it was a relief when the rivers were no longer smooth pathways of ice. Each year some tragedy occurred. In 1693, a whole family was slain in a house outside the stockade. In September, 1694, French and Indians, lurking in the alders just north of the palisades, made a sudden attack in midday. A speedy alarm and determined

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

resistance saved the town. Almost by a miracle, the schoolmistress, Dame Hannah Beaman, fleeing with her flock of school-children from her house outside the stockade, reached its shelter unhurt from the shower of arrows sped to intercept them.

The peace that followed the Treaty of Ryswick in 1697 had scarcely begun to be felt before that brief respite was over. For a short time, attention could be given to the building of roads and fences, a meeting-house, and a dwelling for their young minister John Williams and his wife Esther Mather. Town meetings were established; money voted for a school; and smaller settlements begun north and south of the village. A sense of security prevailed.

In May, 1702, Queen Anne declared war with France. A little over a month later, it was voted in Deerfield "that ye town Fort shall forthwith be righted up." So soon did the effects of renewed war become apparent. Settlers who had begun to build outside of

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

the palisades came crowding in, or in some cases built new ones around their houses. Soldiers were once more quartered here.

Deerfield was now the frontier town to the north. Much concern was felt for her safety throughout the state. Constant guard was maintained. A sentry paced the street at night.

On the night of February 29, 1704, this sentry, grown confident by several weeks of continued safety, being weary toward morning, and, it is said, soothed by hearing a woman crooning to her sick child, slept at his post in the snowy street. A glistening crust covered the earth; and over it, now with a rush, now pausing to listen, and again rushing forward, thus to simulate gusts of wind should there be waking ears to hear, came a horde of two hundred and fifty Indians and Frenchmen led by Hertel De Rouville.

Over the palisades they poured, their horrible war-whoops waking the sleeping village. Men sprang for their guns, but too late! They

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

were overpowered; some killed at once, some bound and carried to the meeting-house where, in the chilly dawn of the grey morning, a sad company of over a hundred men, women and children were soon collected. Houses were pillaged and burned; helpless women and little children brutally killed before the eyes of their nearest and dearest. Hurriedly De Rouville herded the captives from the fort, rushing them across the frozen river to the north.

Hardly had they left the village, before a band of forty valiant men, who had ridden at breakneck speed from Hatfield on seeing the red glare of the burning town reflected on the clouds twelve miles away, followed in furious pursuit. Many Indians were killed, but the pursuers could not contend against the deep snow. The sun had risen, the crust melted; and it was hopeless floundering for the English. The provident French had brought a large supply of snowshoes for their captives! (The next year, five hundred pairs

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

of snowshoes were ordered by the General Court for frontier use.)

This was certainly a successful venture for the French. Forty nine people were killed, one hundred and eleven taken captive; and very few houses were left standing within the central palisade. One of these houses stood until 1848, and was called "The Old Indian House." Its door is preserved in Memorial Hall. Through the hole hacked in it by tomahawks, a bullet was fired that killed the wife of John Sheldon, the owner of the house.

So many tales of heroism and self-sacrifice among those who went as captives on that fearful winter journey to Canada—three hundred miles through the pathless forests and on the ice of frozen rivers—have come down to us, that we count it a proud distinction to be descended from those people.

Those of the captives too weak to keep up on the march were ruthlessly killed; and fear of a similar fate increased the survivors' suf-

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

ferings from cold, wet, and scarcity of food. In a few cases the Indian captors were kind; some of them improvised sleds for the children and drew them, and shared their scanty food with them. And the Canadian families among whom the captives were placed were good to them. Great efforts were made by the zealous Jesuit priests to convert these unhappy Puritan prisoners to Catholicism; alluring promises were held out to them. In some cases they were successful, and we find high officials of the Roman Catholic Church among the descendants of those who remained in Canada.

John Williams, the minister, and five of his children were captured; the two youngest were slain at his door, and his wife killed on the first day's march. All were separated in Canada and remained there two years. The Indian who took Eunice, the eight-year-old daughter, refused to give her up when the others were ransomed in 1706. No amount of money or persuasion prevailed. Eunice be-

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

came an Indian and was married into the tribe at the age of seventeen. Twice, in after years, she came to Deerfield to see her family; but could never be induced to remain. Her home was in St. Francis; her tribe the Abenaki.

In 1837 Eunice's granddaughter and the son and grandsons of the latter came down the Connecticut seeking the place of Eunice's birth. They camped on the hill above the village and sought those of the name of Williams, and were much interested in a little "white papoose" of that name, who, thirty years later, was to be maimed for life by Indians on the far western plains.

To carry the story of Eunice still further. In 1921, a Deerfield girl descended from these captives met in Dublin, N. H., a girl of Indian blood; and they presently discovered that they were both descendants of Robert Williams of England who was Eunice's great-grandfather. The Indian girl, Elizabeth Sadoques, told of the long-cherished legend of the English ancestress, and of the visit of

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

the tribe to Deerfield in 1837. The name Eunice is still handed down in their tribe. At the request of our historical society, Elizabeth Sadoques wrote a most picturesque and charming paper on her Indian ancestors and their ways.

There are many other fascinating accounts of the courage of these pioneers. The wonderful story of the bravery of Ensign John Sheldon is scarcely equalled by any tale of heroism. His losses on that awful night of 1704 were enough to crush an ordinary spirit. His wife and youngest child had been killed. Three of his children and his daughter-in-law, Hannah Chapin of Springfield, had been carried off as captives. Bereft of all his family he rested not until, in the December following, he was on his way to Boston accompanied by young John Wells whose mother also had been captured. The object of the journey was to get from Governor Dudley "license to travel thither" (to Canada). Captain John Livingstone of Albany was prevailed upon



OLD MEETING HOUSE, ABOUT 1680
INDIAN HOUSE IN BACKGROUND

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

to accompany them and to show them the route by Lakes George and Champlain, down the Sorel River to the St. Lawrence, to Quebec.

Miss C. Alice Baker in her truly great work, "True Stories of New England Captives," tells of this journey in so remarkable a paragraph that it must be quoted here.

"We need not go back to King Arthur for exploits of chivalry; our colonial history is full of them. This man, long past the daring impulses of youth,—this youth, whose life was all before him—show me two braver knights-errant setting out with loftier purpose, on a more perilous pilgrimage."

"Three hundred miles of painful and unaccustomed tramping on snowshoes in mid-winter, over mountain and morass, through tangled thickets and 'snow-clogged forest,' where with fell purpose the cruel savage lurked; with gun in hand and pack on back, now wading knee deep over some rapid stream, now in the teeth of the fierce north wind, toiling over the slippery surface of the

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

frozen lake, now shuffling tediously along in the sodden ice of some half-thawed river, digging away the drifts at night for his camp; wet, lame, half-famished, and chilled to the bone, hardly daring to build a fire,—a bit of dried meat from his pack for supper, spruce boughs for his bed, crouching there wrapped in his blanket, his head muffled in the hood of his capote, eye and ear alert, his mittened hand grasping the hilt of his knife at his belt; up at daybreak and on again, through storm and sleet, pelted by pitiless rains, or blinded by whirling snow,—what iron will and nerves of steel, sound mind in sound body, to dare and do what this man did!”

Arriving at Quebec, they were courteously received by Governor de Vaudreuil and allowed to see John Williams, their beloved pastor. From him they learned that the mother of Wells had died on the journey, but that Sheldon’s children were living. At length in March, a letter from one of the Deerfield captives gave them more definite news:—“I pray

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

give my kind loue to Landlord Shelden, and tel him that i am sorry for all his los. I doe in these few lins showe youe that god has shon yo grat kindness and marcy. In carrying youre Daughter Hanna, and Mary in Pertickeler, through so grat a iorney, far beiend my expectation, noing How Lane they war; the Rest of your children are with the Indians, Rememberrance liues near cabect, Hannah also Liues with the frenc, Jn in the same house i doe.”

Not until May did Ensign John Sheldon complete negotiations for the ransom of his heroic daughter-in-law, Hannah Sheldon, his daughter, Mary Sheldon, Esther Williams, and two other captives. All had suffered and shown the exemplary fortitude which had created the colonies. But the admirable courage of Hannah Sheldon should not be forgotten. She, a bride of a few weeks, and her young husband had, during the attack, jumped from the second story east window of their house (since called the Old Indian House). In fall-

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

ing, her ankle was sprained, and she knew that escape was hopeless. Nevertheless, she urged her husband to hasten to give the alarm to the settlements below while helping to bind up his bare feet in strips of blanket.

Twice afterward did John Sheldon go to Canada to arrange for the redemption of captives.

Stephen Williams, son of the Rev. John, wrote a most interesting account of his boyhood experience on the fearful winter's journey of 1704, and of his life with the Indians. Rev. John Williams published a little book, "The Redeemed Captive," soon after his return from Canada in the Autumn of 1706. This gives a full and graphic account of all that he saw and suffered. With rare fortitude and devotion, he returned to his desolated home and people in Deerfield having refused offers of greater ease and security. In 1707, the people of Deerfield built for him the noble house which is still standing. There he lived until his death in 1729.

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

Of all the captives, Mehuman Hinsdale must not be forgotten. He, the first white child born in Deerfield, had a remarkable life. His father was killed in the Bloody Brook Fight; he and his wife were captured in 1704; their baby was slain; and they were carried to Canada where they remained as captives for two years. Ransomed in the Autumn of 1706, they returned to Boston on the French vessel "La Marie." During this voyage, another son was born, Ebenezer, who graduated twenty years later from Harvard College. Some years after, Ebenezer Hinsdale, while stationed as Chaplain at Fort Dummer, bought up gradually much land on the further side of the Connecticut and founded the town of Hinsdale, New Hampshire. Mehuman was again captured in 1709 while bringing a load of fruit trees from Northampton to Deerfield. Again he was carried to Canada, made to run the gauntlet, thrown into prison in Quebec, and kept there many months because he would not reveal the plans of the English.

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

After many ups and downs of hope and despair, he was sent to France, made his way to London; and finally reached home after an absence of three and a half years.

Endless romance can be discovered in the records of those days of danger and heroism. Miss C. Alice Baker, after much close scrutiny of the church records in Canada, was able to piece together many bits of the lives of these captives. It is amazing to see how many were carried into captivity from all over New England. Captives were preferred to scalps whenever it was possible to secure them.

Trouble with the French and Indians continued until the year 1713 when the Treaty of Utrecht between France and England was signed. Soon after that, these same Indians began to flock in to sell furs and to buy coveted articles from the settlers. Difficult it must have been to tolerate these savages whose cruelty had broken up so many families and destroyed so many homes.

Four young men who had made a valiant

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

escape from Canada and reached Deerfield after terrible sufferings and incredible escapes became ardent scouts a little later when the war known as Father Rasle's War broke out along the northern boundaries. These boundaries, unfortunately, had not been definitely determined by the Treaty. Ninety-two men formed a company to protect Deerfield and Northfield. Conferences were held at Albany, and messengers on horseback went rapidly back and forth to Boston. Much agitation prevailed and a few fatal events occurred. Father Rasle was killed in 1724, but Indian incursions did not subside at once. A block house, called Fort Dummer, was established a little above Northfield on the Connecticut River. All through these years great efforts were made to keep in touch with other towns in defence of the border. The constant need of scouting and of keeping watch by day and by night became very taxing. Pathetic memorials from men of sixty and seventy asking to be absolved from further duty show this

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

strain. Every harvest time, guards had to be renewed and there was frequent loss of life, chiefly of the men needful to the community.

Conferences with the Indians were held at Albany and Boston in the year 1723 in the vain effort to conciliate them. The death in 1724 of the Governor of Canada, Marquis de Vaudreuil, at last brought a cessation of hostilities. His policy is well defined in an old letter which says, "Ye Governor of Canada looks for a speedy peace, but will do as much spoyle as he can before it comes."

It is very evident that many of the hostilities arose in this way. The French often undertook raids upon the English to keep their Indian allies in good humor.

Twenty years of peace now intervened, although not without annoyances from the Indians. Much diplomacy was needed in dealing with them. In 1735 a great gathering was held in Deerfield. Governor Belcher and his suite met delegates of the Six Nations and a representative of the French in Canada here

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

to renew pledges of friendship. At the same time, a service was held in the old meeting-house to ordain John Sergeant as minister and missionary to the Housatonic Indians in Stockbridge. An imposing sight it must have been to see the New England dignitaries and the Indian chiefs in full regalia. The Indians rose in a body when addressed in their own language by Stephen Williams through an interpreter.

During this interval of peace, which lasted until 1744, Deerfield grew in population. Outside settlements were started at Green River (afterwards Greenfield), Wapping, and Bloody Brook, and at a place called "The Bars," so named because here, where the land rose up from the two intervening miles of meadow, were the bars of the great fence surrounding these meadows; so that after the crops were harvested, the cattle, duly branded, could be turned loose to graze in the autumn. The only road leading south passed through these bars, and it was thought a village would

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

here be established; therefore a wide street was laid out. Two families, the Allens and the Amsdens, built here about 1730. A brook then ran beside the road, and near it and not far from the Allens' house an old squaw and her sick son lived in a wigwam, lingering after the rest of the tribe had departed because the lad was too ill to travel. Much kindness was shown them by the Allens at this time. At length, the son died and was buried on a little hill to the south, still called Squaw's Hill. A tradition, handed down from generation to generation in the Allen family, as one of them says, "by the blazing hickory logs in the large open fireplace," tells how, early in 1746, before any sense of danger had come to the Deerfield inhabitants in that new and last war with France, the old squaw, evidently warned of coming danger, disinterred the body of her son, washed his bones in the brook, slung them over her back in a bag and departed over the hills,—the last of her race in Deerfield.

In August that same summer, rumors of an



Photo by Frances and Mary Allen
AN OLD DEERFIELD DOORWAY

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

invasion were brought in, and the people in the outlying region sought the safety of the fort or palisades. On the 25th, Samuel Allen, with three of his children, two Amsden boys, and two soldiers to guard them, came down to the Bars to make hay. A party of Indians concealed in the woods nearby fell upon them, killed Samuel Allen bravely defending his children, captured the youngest, little Sammy, tomahawked Eunice without killing her; but failed to discover the older boy hiding in the tall corn. Both Amsden boys and one soldier were killed.

These Indians were part of a large force of French and Indians that had taken Fort Massachusetts a few days before. 'T is said they wished for more captives. Little Sammy was the only one they secured; he was carried to Canada. A year and a half later his uncle, Sergeant John Hawks, and two other men were sent to Canada to escort a young French officer taken at Northfield, and to search for Sammy. In vain was his search; even with

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

the help of the Governor, he could not discover his whereabouts. In despair, John Hawks was about to return home when one day, as he sat meditating what more could be done, an old squaw with a blanket over her head peered in at the door; at first Hawks took no notice, but as she came a second time, he recognized her as the old squaw of the Bars. With much mystery and many signs of caution she brought Sammy to him, and at last, after a journey of considerable danger, Sammy Allen was returned to his mother whose kindness to the old squaw was thus ten fold repaid. Sammy lived to be an old man but always declared the Indian way of life the best.

This was the last Indian raid in Deerfield, but by no means the last of the sufferings and anxieties they caused. Deerfield men were in this war as soldiers and scouts, as surgeons and colonels, until its close in 1763 when England at last owned all Canada.

The tide of English settlement swept almost

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

all trace of Indian occupation before it. New towns were laid out, new houses built, churches and schools established. Free from outside harrying, the English soon found causes of worry and dissension in their relations with the mother country. The great divergence of opinion between Whig and Tory became more and more intricate and absorbing. Excited gatherings took place at Hoyt's Tavern (The Old Indian House) and strenuous arguments waxed hot. News was brought here once a week by a horseman riding from Boston to Deerfield, where he was met by riders from towns farther away. Here the tidings of the Stamp Act, and later of its repeal, were discussed at length.

The most direct route from Boston to Albany in those days was by the "Bay Path" to Springfield, up the Connecticut River to Hatfield and Deerfield; thence westward along the Deerfield River to Hoosac Mountain, that great barrier of the lower Green Mountain Range. Here the Deerfield River turns

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

abruptly north; and the trail then follows a smaller, dashing river that comes from a deep ravine of the mountains to join the Deerfield. Up this stream and over Mount Housac led the trail long known to the Mohawk Indians. It led along the crests of the mountains onward to New York State. A line of forts was established in 1744 from this line to the Connecticut River: Fort Massachusetts near the New York border, later called Williamstown; Fort Shirley in Heath; Fort Pelham in Rowe; Forts Taylor, Rice and Hawks in Charlemont; Forts Lucas and Morrison in Colrain; Fort Dummer on the Connecticut. Scouting parties patrolled between these forts in times of greatest danger. In spite of this, many people were surprised and killed all through the years of Indian warfare.

The old "Albany Road," a section of the direct route from Boston to Albany, turned west from the "training field" or common in Deerfield village; and led to the river which was crossed at a ford called "Old Fort." From

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

there it followed a course over the Shelburne Hills to join the curving Deerfield River further on. The old road over the hills is now scarcely discernible, and is impassable except for pedestrians. **1796331**

In the village, "The Albany Road" appears to have been the scene of many industries. Most important to travellers were the saddler's, and blacksmith's shops. Here, too, were the felt makers, shoemakers, weavers, jewellers, and watchmakers. At the southern corner of the common, was a tavern; later used as a printing office for "The Franklin Freeman" published in 1831. During the Revolution, this tavern was kept by one Sexton, an ardent Whig; and was known as the Whig Tavern. The Tory Tavern was at the opposite end of the common.

In 1773 a meeting of Tories was held at Seth Catlin's and in December of that year occurred the Boston Tea Party, and a jollification party was held by the Whigs, who broke up singing:

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

“Who went aboard the British ship, their
vengeance to administer,
And didn’t care a tarnal bit for any king or
minister,
Who made a deuced mess of tea, in one of
the biggest dishes,
Steeped the Bohea in the sea, and treated all
the fishes.”

The proposed erection of a Liberty Pole the next year, 1774, roused great indignation. It was drawn into town to be set up next day, but it was found in the morning cut in two in the middle. Nevertheless, a pole was erected in spite of all protests and the preaching of the old Tory minister, Parson Ashley. Upon this pole, patriotic poetical effusions were placed, more amusing to us who read them to-day than to those who were on fire with enthusiasm for the Liberal cause; or to those to whom it was a deep rooted aversion, in fact, a disloyalty from the Tory’s point of view. “No taxation without representation”

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

was the cry. A company of men drilled quickly; fifty were ready to set off at once when a mud-splashed, breathless rider arrived here April 20, 1775, with the news of the Battle of Lexington the day before.

On May 6, Colonel Benedict Arnold came here and met Thomas Dickinson at the Barnard Tavern (now Frary House) to arrange for the purchase of beef; and so swiftly were his requests obeyed that the next day, although it was Sunday, fifteen great oxen were on their way to Fort Ticonderoga. Meantime, the Tories found life more and more uncomfortable; although they still continued to drink their tea which was smuggled in under cover of some other commodity. Even the Tory Minister, Rev. Johnathan Ashley, was made to feel the animosity of the Whigs who at one time "cut off his firewood"; but it is doubtful if he was ever allowed to suffer seriously. When he refused to read the proclamation by Congress for a Thanksgiving Day, 'tis said that his son read it for him;

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

and at the close, "God save the Commonwealth of Massachusetts," the old man arose and added fervently, "And the King, too, I say, or we are an undone people." Since, in those days, ministers were settled for life, it was impossible for the Whigs to dislodge him.

Many of the most prominent families here were Tories. Bitter enmities arose; and, as there had been much intermarrying, results were often painful, and left curious contradictions of character among the descendants. At the close of the Revolutionary War, the turmoil of feeling gradually subsided; and the Tories were soon taking the oaths of allegiance to the new Republic.

But history should not be a record of warfare only. It is enough to say that Deerfield has ever borne her part nobly in the succeeding wars of this country. Her men have proved brave and patriotic and her women generous and devoted to the cause of right. As the scene of struggle shifted away from here, Deerfield developed into one of the finest of

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

the New England villages, a kind of community unique unto itself; not a mere rustic settlement, but the dwelling place of a fine, self-controlled people, fully alive to all the vital interests of the day, keen to criticise, eager to estimate, appreciative and glad to assimilate whatever was excellent. In these homes were men and women of genuine discrimination for the best; their churches, their houses, their books show it; the cheap and ornate had little place here. Formalities and fine bearing almost invariably accompanied the wearing of the ruffled shirts and smallclothes of the men and the fine laces and flowing skirts of the women. Beautiful old silver and delicate china were gradually accumulated and cherished, and are still handed down as the most precious of possessions.

All sorts of handicrafts were the result of long years of isolation and the need to do everything for themselves. Tillers of the soil most of these people were, but they held their work in a respect that elevated it. Indeed,

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

some of them looked half contemptuously at trade and store-keeping. Great pride in their lands was bred in their bones.

Their church was the center of interest. The old meeting-house built in 1729 was past repair in 1823, and in 1924 the stately red brick meeting-house was built; its beautiful spire adorned with the original gilt weather-cock bought by the town for the first meeting-house in 1731. The deep-toned musical bell is said to have been recast and a number of silver dollars added to the metal as it was molten, greatly enhancing its richness of tone.

In 1797, it was voted to build an academy, and it was formally opened January 1, 1799. The fine old brick building, now Memorial Hall, was its home until 1876. Pupils of both sexes came from all over the state, driving in chaises over poor roads from fifty or a hundred miles around. They lived in the Academy with the family of the Principal, in rooms where tiny fireplaces were the only means of heat. A high standard of scholarship was

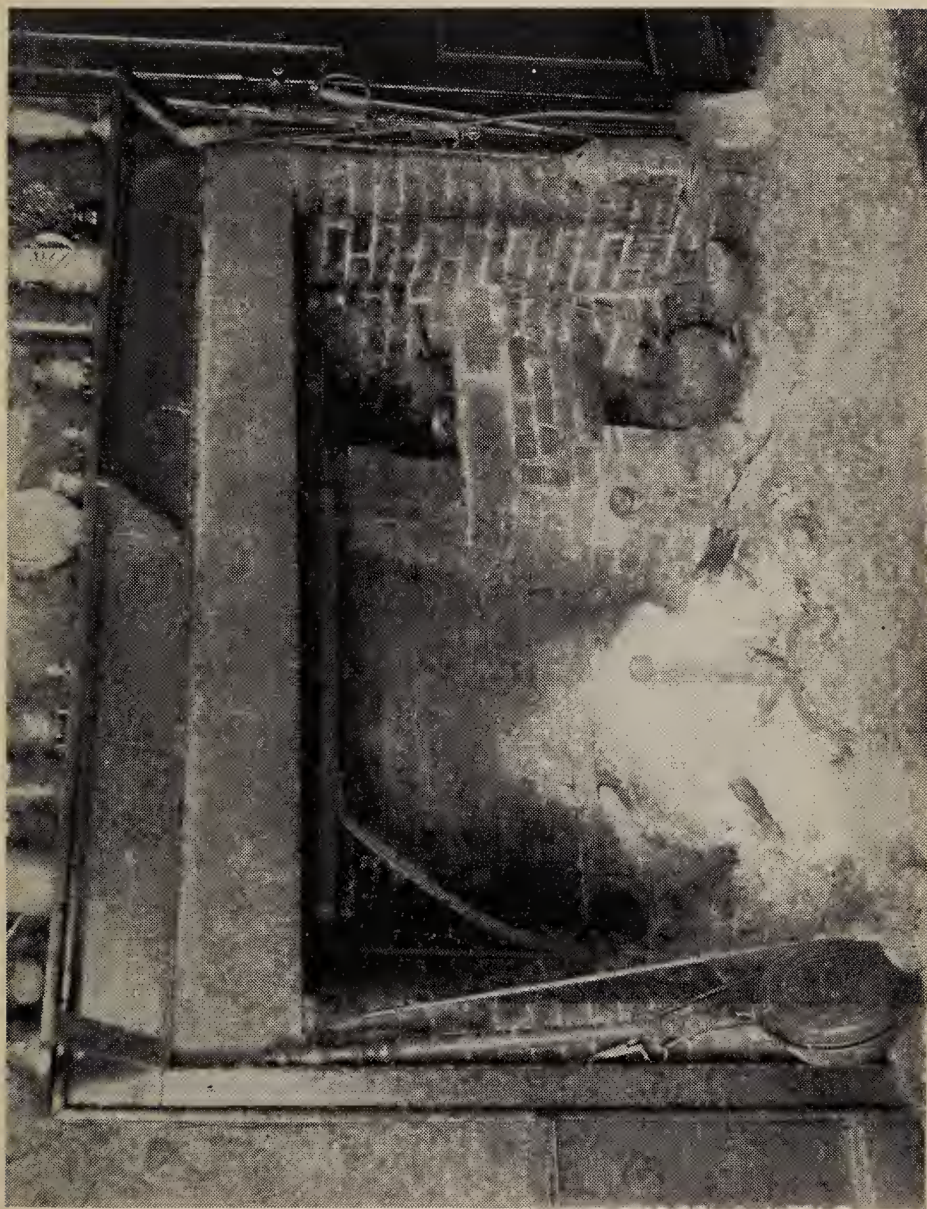


Photo by Frances and Mary Allen

AN OLD DEERFIELD FIREPLACE

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

maintained. Astronomy was taught and carried far by Edward Hitchcock, a Deerfield boy who became President of Amherst College. A planetarium and a lunarium were presented by Colonel Asa Stebbins. A course in "The Theoretical and Practical Art of War" was introduced by Major Epaphras Hoyt when war with England became imminent in 1810.

A musical society is on record in 1803. A society called "The Literary Adelphi" was formed in 1804, and "The Young Ladies Literary Society" in 1813. Singing schools were never lacking. The village choir was assisted by stringed instruments. The itinerant portrait painters were well patronized and the portraits often fine; not only portraying the personality of the sitters, but often preserving marked family characteristics. Early editions of books are heirlooms here. The first American edition of the Waverly novels was issued at intervals in paper covers. Eagerly were they watched for. The story is told of one old man who would sit by the blazing hearth

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

of a winter's evening holding a broad-based brass candlestick containing a homemade tallow dip in one hand and a new Waverly novel in the other. Probably cider and nuts interspersed the tale.

On an old, square, four-legged stand, in the dining room of one large family always stood a dictionary, a gazetteer and a botany; and many a meal was interrupted by the search for some word or place, or the genus of some rare flower just brought in. Conversation turned on things like these. Wit was abundant and appreciated. By no means were the people of those days dull and pedantic.

The library played a great part in the life of the people. We find records of a small library soon after the Revolution, followed by "The Social Library," "The Military Library," "An Agricultural Library," "A Juvenile Library," and finally "The Deerfield Reading Association," which included most of those which preceded it. The Thursday evening meetings of this society were weekly events

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

of much moment. They were held in a long room of the old Post Office. The postmistress was librarian and the moving spirit for many years. She sat at the head of a long table on which the new magazines were spread out. The members took seats on either side or stood near, while the young people gathered in subdued but animated groups in the background. Drawing by lot for the newest magazine was conducted with great solemnity and many suppressed exclamations of dismay. "The Atlantic," "The Living Age" and "Lippincott's" and "The Galaxy" were great favorites.

After the Revolution, the occupation of the people changed, commerce commenced to be more prominent. Then began the raising of cattle for export, and long droves would plod their dusty way to the Brighton markets. Broom corn was raised in large quantities. In 1795, boats bringing merchandise began to come up the Connecticut to Cheapside; canals were built; warehouses established, and many commodities loaded upon those curious old

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

boats to be floated down the river to Hartford. To bring the boats back long poles and oars were used, an arduous process, superseded in 1826 by a small steamer. The Deerfield River was ever the resource and the romance of Deerfield. Its fresh, sparkling waters, unsullied by factories and sewers, provided fish in great abundance; the clearest of ice could be cut in winter. The spring floods brought fertility to the meadows they covered; firewood, too, piled up along its banks. The ravine at Stillwater, where the river left the western hills, often echoed to the songs and jests of boating parties and swimmers; and skaters could follow the course of the river five miles to its junction with the Connecticut.

Eastward from the dwellings in the village home lots extended to the hill; westward to the river; each family had also its share of tillable meadow-land, a pasture on the mountain side and a wood lot. The divisions of meadow-land were known as cow-commons

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

and the name "First and Second Divisions" are kept to-day. The wayward river sometimes carried off large portions of fields along its edge and left uncovered new land on its opposite shore. A load of hay crossing by a ford was not an unusual sight.

Every family kept cows: the breathless stillness of summer mornings would be broken by the soft thud of their feet and the munching of the sweet, short grass along the village street as they were driven to pasture by reluctant boys. Fences were almost universal. The village green or common was surrounded by a white two-rail fence with large square-topped posts. Water was brought by pipes from springs on the hill. One church sufficed for these people until 1838.

Farming was almost the only industry. Tobacco and onions gradually superseded the other crops, although corn is still raised in large quantities by the few remaining farmers. One by one the great barns have closed their doors or they have been converted into

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

studios. The home lots have become lawns or gardens; the pastures have grown up to bushes and young trees. Specialization has overtaken Deerfield. Her specialties are schools, the marvelous collection of Memorial Hall and the revival of old-time embroidering, weaving and other handicrafts.

The history of Memorial Hall is not out of place here. In the late sixties of the nineteenth century, the families, gathered by the open fire of a winter's evening, would hear the familiar tap of a cane on the porch; the iron knocker would sound a quick rap and almost simultaneously the door of the sitting room would open and a tall, slender man with a long, white beard would enter, filling the doorway of the low-ceiled room. His keen, black eyes bespoke youth and vitality that even his bald head and white beard could not contradict. Taking his seat in the three-cornered chair by the fire, across the hearth from the old grandmother of eighty in her rocking-chair, he would begin to talk of old, old

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

times. The child sitting between them understood little but remembers the repeated query—"Well, who was she?"—"Who did she marry?"—"What year was that?" Not until he was over fifty did Mr. George Sheldon find leisure to devote himself seriously to discover the facts and piece together bits of information slowly but surely being lost to posterity.

As he drove about all over the country, from Northfield and Ashfield and Hatfield, seeking every clue, Mr. Sheldon also collected articles that he knew should not be allowed to disappear. Others became fired by his zeal and in 1870 the Pocumtuck Valley Memorial Association was formed and held its first meeting. In 1876 the Association purchased the old Academy building and placed these cherished things in a suitable and safe place. Since then the collection has grown continuously; and in 1915, Mrs. Sheldon built the fireproof wing for old manuscripts and other precious things.

The "History of Deerfield," from which

THE STORY OF DEERFIELD

most of the facts of this story are taken, was published by Mr. Sheldon in 1895. This work is the splendid result of years of infinite labor, and contains the best account of the activities of the Indians in this region of the Connecticut Valley. Also, as a result of Mr. Sheldon's labors, a complete genealogy of the families of Deerfield has been permanently recorded.

Deerfield has had her heroes of war, her Indian fighters, her Revolutionary soldiers, her splendid men in the Civil War, and her young heroes in the World War. She has had her writers, her painters, her poets; her artists of many sorts; and beautiful souls who expressed themselves only by their fine lives, and by their enthusiasm for all that is best.

The beauty of Deerfield's surroundings and her long, elm-shaded village are well known.

Concentration of village life has passed away, and the more general life has come; and with it new ways and new people. But all unite to honor the old and to preserve all that is possible of the past.

